

## Quita's Kidnaping

By Izola L. Forrester

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Mariquita Josepha Maria was her name, according to the baptismal records in the little white mission church at San Junipero. Over at Happy Chance we called her Quita.

Some way she seemed to belong more to Happy Chance than she did to San Junipero, with its soft toned bells and the solitude of cloistered gardens. She was tall and slim and sunburned, with lips like the heart of a rose and dark shadowy eyes that looked sidelong at one and made the earth seem an excellent place to live in.

Before Happy Chance had opened up as a silver mining center the shack of old Tom Ferrier had held its own up on the mountain side and dominated the whole valley. No one knew when it had been built. Ferrier had drifted from camp to camp down through Colorado and crosswise through the Sierras until Mexico was the limit, and he found Happy Chance. It was a bit of the wilderness that had escaped fortune seekers and railroad surveyors, and he held it for his own and believed that some day he would be a silver king.

In earnest of that belief he had built the shack and married Dolores Ruiz, daughter of the old Mexican who claimed the valley by prior right. The result was a success in a way. There were no signs of silver, but there was Quita.

When the strike did come, fifteen years later, both Ferrier and the Mexican lay in the deep sleep up among the pines on the hills, and from the lone shack Quita and her mother looked down on the valley and saw the chosen of the Lord of Mammon sweep away their Canaan and its wealth. But they were wise, being women, and showed no fight, and Happy Chance as a law abiding community reviewed their case and admitted them to a share in the profits of their own property and shook hands with itself over its generosity.

The summer after the strike Larry Carroll alighted in camp, and we entertained him unawares, not seeing any wings. We had heard of Larry before. He was a gentlemanly boy with a good record behind him of ways of honor. He was a miner, but he never mined. He would follow the cry of fame to a new camp and laze around for a few weeks until he found a claim that suited him. He paid in cash, and the camp would see him no more until one day he would come back with some poor innocent of a capitalist he had cornered, and the claim would change hands, and Larry would ride on in triumph, ten thousand to the good.

It showed a depth of intuitive wisdom that the world respected, and Happy Chance welcomed him; also he had a winning way with women. He was gay hearted and debonaire and masterful, with eyes of Irish blue and hair like a water spaniel, chestnut curled. He never wooed with words; only with his eyes. They were sufficient. You cannot make out a case against a man on the score of tender eyes. So Larry rode scot free over a highway of sighing hearts until he struck Happy Chance and Quita.

There was a dance at Dorrit's the night he came, and he rambled in. Quita was dancing, and as he stood in the doorway, watching, she whirled by him on big Sim Rawdon's arm, and the cluster of scarlet mountain flowers she wore in her hair fell at Larry's feet. Sim went back for them. They were in the breast pocket of Larry's shirt, and the two went outdoors to settle the argument for possession, while Quita perched herself on a window sill and smiled contentedly.

It was the beginning of a state of affairs which Happy Chance resented. Rawdon owned the biggest claim in camp and if we ever grew to be a city we intended making him mayor or chief of police or something interesting. In the dream of the future Quita had shared his honors in our minds. She belonged to Happy Chance. It was right that she should have the best article in its marriage market, and neither Sim nor Quita had objected up to date. But with the coming of Larry there was a change. We carried Sim home from the dance with a bullet in his shoulder, and Larry went back and finished the waltz with Quita.

The next day Sim went to the shack with a bandaged shoulder and spoke up like a man, knowing that public sentiment was with him. When he came back he invited us all to the wedding, and Larry tipped his chair farther back on the shady stoop of the Silver Star and whistled softly.

The wedding was set for the following Saturday, and Sim rode every day to the shack and came back with a smile on his lips and a spray of scarlet flowers from the vine that grew on Quita's hillside. But Saturday at sunset, when he rode after his bride, he came back without smile or flowers and told his story to the crowd that waited in the Silver Star. Quita was gone. Old Dolores said she had been carried off by the devil with the Irish eyes to the mountains, and Sim asked for company.

We were willing to go. She was a home product, and we didn't propose having any stray blue eyed maverick come out of the north and steal her away.

Up through the valley we rode that night, forded the Yarba just below the falls and took to the broken trail that led to the mountains on the California line. Larry was making for the

States by his tracks, and we hoped to catch him before he struck a railroad. "Will you plug him on sight, Sim?" asked Keno Davis, in mild interest.

"I don't believe there'll be any shaking hands," said Sim grimly, and we gloried in the coming fight.

Just before sunrise we came upon them half way up Bald mountain. As we rounded a corner of the trail a gray sombrero showed above the tangled growth of vines and ferns that clung to the top of the rocks. Sim put a bullet through it neatly. The answer laid Keno Davis out under the shade of a scrub pine, and we decided to rest and do battle scientifically, as Larry had a clear eye and a mighty good chance to take his pick of a hostile force. While the rest of us engaged his interest from the trail below the rock, Sim took four others and started on a detour to reach a point above.

It was a good fight. There was no yelling or Apache war dancing, only a steady, quiet interchange of compliments that meant business, and a gradually closing in around the rock.

We knew Quita must be with him, but whether she had fainted or been bound we could not tell, until suddenly a clear, sharp cry rang out, and every man lowered his gun at the sound. It was a cry for help, we believed, and we sent back a shout that echoed in long leaps up the deep ravines and gulches. For an instant the firing from the rock ceased, then began again, faster than ever, but not so sure. All at once the voice of Sim shouted from above.

"For God's sake, boys, quit firing!" It was hard to obey with victory so near and the bullets flying wild around our heads from the hidden hand behind the rock. But we stopped, they did also, and we scrambled from ledge to ledge up over the ragged, splintered stones until the top was gained, and we looked down on Larry and his captive.

It was a strange sight. Back against the rough, gray rocks stood Quita, her eyes aflame with reckless courage and defiance. Larry's two revolvers were gripped, still smoking in her hands. At her feet lay Larry, his white face upturned to the dawning light and a dull, crimson stain soaking the right side of his gray flannel shirt.

"I'll shoot the first one that dares to touch him!" called Quita. "You're a pack of cowards to follow and hold us up like this! What's he done?"

"He stole you."

It was Sim who answered her.

Quita turned on him like a flash.

"He didn't steal me, Sim. I ran away with him because I loved him, and it seemed better to go at the last moment than to marry you and love him all the same. I thought a girl could choose the man she loved and not have a whole camp chase her and shoot him down. You don't play fair, boys."

There was a dead silence. Her eyes were full of tears, and Happy Chance hid his head in shame. It is not pleasant to have a gallant rescue knocked in the head by the scorn of a woman's will.

But Sim stood without shame or anger and stared at the white, young face at Quita's feet, and at last without a word he went down and lifted Larry in his arms and made his way with him to the trail, and Quita followed slowly.

At Prospero we left the three, and Sim never gave up his guard until the wound was healed, and Quita rode into camp beside her husband as Mrs. Larry Carroll.

There were no hard feelings. As Larry said, no laws had been broken but the law of the heart, and each heart has a law of its own.

But when it was all over Sim sold out his mine to him and went back over the mountains to the States. We understood and did not blame him. It is easier to save the life of the man you hate than to stand by and see the girl you love as his wife.

Not Catherine of Aragon. Mr. Dan O'Harrigan was not the most modest man that ever came from Ireland, and his most constant boast concerned his ancestry.

He was at an evening party a short time since, and at the first opportunity he held forth upon the old theme to a fascinating young lady guest.

"Yes," he said, "sure, I may be a poor nobody in these days, but centuries ago in me own country me ancestors were kings."

"Indeed," smiled his fair auditor, "but yet, do you know, although I have studied history fairly well, I do not recall any royal personage called O'Harrigan." She thought she had cornered him, but she had miscalculated his gift of repartee.

"Sure, it must be joking ye are," he said. "An' did ye never read of Mistress Katherine O'Harrigan, who married Henry VIII, the owl villain? Sure, she wuz me grandmother's great-great-grandmother!" — London Answers.

Plenty of Raw Material. "Grandpa," said the children, "tell us another story about the time when you were a young man and traveled with the show."

"Well," said Grandfather Dutton, "when I was with the circus forty or fifty years ago one of my great aunts was to get a boy to put an apple on top of his head, and then I would stand ten paces away and shoot a rifle ball through it."

"But didn't you sometimes miss the apple and shoot the boy?"

"Not often. But it happened once in awhile, of course."

"What did you do then?" they asked breathlessly.

"Do?" said Grandfather Dutton, shrugging his shoulders. "Why, sometimes I had to wait two or three minutes before I could find another boy, but not often. There are always plenty of boys."

## Prodigal Father's Intention.

The prodigal son had just come home.

"I really meant this reception to impress your mother," confided the old gentleman. "My welcome when I came home from the club last night was very different."

Satisfied with having set a fine example for the future, he turned his attention to the meal.—New York Tribune.

## In Comparison.

"I don't believe there is anything in the world hotter than a cup of chocolate!"

"Oh, yes there is," replied the wise guy. "The man who burns his tongue trying to drink it in a hurry."—Cincinnati Times-Star.

Many a man lays the foundation of his misfortune by knowing too many things that are none of his business.

The best part of repentance is little sinning.—Arabian Proverb.

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